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ABSTRACT

The selection and purchase of instructional films for use in elementary and secondary schools is a complex process. Generally choosing a film is the task of the classroom teacher or the principal. However the decision can involve a wide variety of other personnel including audiovisual coordinators, business managers, and librarians. This survey of 114 randomly selected school districts reveals that the individual teacher appears to be the most important element in film selection, with the school principal next in importance. In addition, the survey also shows that the media budget for these districts amounted to only one percent of the total operational budget. This, the authors note, is a significant departure from the estimate of four percent made by the Commission on Instructional Technology. Finally, the survey shows that only a minority of schools have a stated policy for evaluating and selecting films. (MC)

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A Nationwide Survey to Determine Who Chooses Instructional Films

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Introduction

Peter Drucker in The Age of Discontinuity claims that "Teaching today requires far too many people," and "The productivity of education is too low even for the richest country."[1] It is commonplace today that education is labor intensive with estimates as high as eighty-five cents of every dollar spent going to teacher salaries.[2] The Commission on Instructional Technology noted that no more than four percent of the per pupil expenditures in public schools in any year is spent for instructional materials.[3] Leslie Gottardi, with a survey of 126 selected public school

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districts in Pennsylvania, found that there was a large discrepancy between the recommended expenditure for audiovisual instructional materials and the actual expenditure.[4] Thus the question of resource allocation in the educational sphere is one of pressing concern.

The next question which is related to this is who in the educational establishment decides how the dollars allocated to instructional media and materials are to be spent. Standard textbooks[5] and polemical pamphlets[6] are available for theory and opinion, but empirical data are hard to find. This study addresses itself to a specific aspect of this larger question. Namely, it poses the questions: Who selects instructional films for the schools to rent or purchase? What criteria are employed to determine which films should be acquired? How are media budgets allocated? Although there has been considerable theorizing about these subjects, a search through ERIC and SRIS documents and articles listed in CIJE failed to locate empirical data on these questions.

Method

In order to investigate these questions, questionnaires were sent to the superintendents of 174 school districts randomly selected from the approximately 14,000 school districts listed in the 1970 Education Almanac.[7] The superintendents were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Who decides which instructional films are to be bought? Check all that apply:
    a. Business manager
    b. Librarian
    c. Teacher committee
    d. Individual teacher
    e. Building principal
    f. Audiovisual coordinator
    g. Other, please specify .....

2. Approximately, what is your total budget (in dollars)?
3. Approximately, how many dollars are allocated to instructional media?
4. Approximately, how were the instructional media dollars divided?
    a. Purchase of equipment
    b. Purchase of films
    c. Rental of films
5. Do you have a stated policy for the evaluation and selection of films?
    a. Yes
    b. No

A total of 114 questionnaires were returned. No systematic differences were observed between respondents and non-respondents in terms of geographic region, size of school, or grades included. Districts ranged in size from a minimum of 301 to a maximum of 40,663 pupils with a mean of 3,545. The majority of districts responding included grades 1-12 or K-12. (For a description of the sample, see Tables 1 to 4.)

Results (See Table 5)

The individual teacher appears to be the most important element in film selection. The individual teacher category was indicated by 54.5 percent of the respondents. The category "teacher committees" was indicated by 28.7 percent of respondents.

Respondents used the "other" category to indicate non-teaching personnel whose primary concern is instruction or curriculum such as department chairmen, 3.5 percent; director or coordinator of instruction, 2.7 percent; or subject area coordinator, instructional supervisor, or curriculum director, 0.9 percent each.

Administrators have an important voice in film selection; 46.5 percent of the respondents indicated that building principals are involved in film selection, 6.1 percent indicated that the school

business manager is involved.

Respondents wrote in the "other" category district superintendent, 4.4 percent; assistant superintendent, 3.5 percent; or county staff, 0.9 percent. School administrators are involved in the decision-making over half the districts.

The role of the librarian is certainly not one of a passive keeper of the materials. 40.4 percent of the sample chose the librarian as a person who makes or shares in the decision.

The majority of responding districts do not have audiovisual coordinators. (Or else they have audiovisual coordinators who have no voice in the selection of films.) Only 32.5 percent checked this category. An additional 4.4 percent indicated county AV offices in the "other" category, 1.8 percent reported regional IMC Film Cooperative Library, and 1.8 percent reported Director of Educational Materials.

An inspection of Table 6 will show that the instructional media budget was about one percent of the total budget. Since the respondents were asked to confine their answer to the 1970-71 school year this could be a reflection of the economic climate, but it is significantly lower than the estimate from the Commission on Instructional Technology quoted above.

From Tables 7 and 8 one can see that although 78.1 percent checked the category of equipment purchase, fewer gave an estimated percentage or a dollar figure. Similarly, 48.2 percent of the sample checked the category "film purchase" indicating that their district did purchase films, and 73.3 percent checked "film rental" (see Table 8). Also, fewer gave estimated percentages (Table 7) and fewer still gave

actual dollar figures (Table 6). From these responses, however, we can see that more districts rent films than actually purchase them, although the dollars allocated (mean $2,500 for purchase and $2,160 for rental), and the percentages estimated (24% for purchase and 22.6% for rental) indicated that equal resources are allocated to both avenues of action.

In addition, respondents were asked if they had a stated policy for the evaluation and selection of films. Only 13.2 percent said they did have such a policy. 77.2 percent said they had no policy, and 9.6 percent did not respond (see Table 9).

Discussion

From the mean of 2.3 categories marked we conclude that film purchasing decisions typically involved two or three people. The most important of these is the classroom teacher. School administrators are typically involved, audiovisual coordinators typically are not. Librarians are involved in many cases. Only a minority of schools have a stated policy for evaluating and selecting films.

In conclusion, the picture that emerges from this survey is that the decisions involved in instructional materials selection and purchase neither conform to the textbook model where teacher committees conscientiously select appropriate materials, nor to the cynical statement that: "Salesmen sell films to librarians." The reality, as always, is infinitely more complex.

References

1. Peter F. Drucker, The Age of Discontinuity, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 335.

2. Francis Lehaney, "The Shakeout in Education," The Exchange, XXX (May, 1969), p. 1.

3. Leslie Gottardi, "A Survey of Instructional Media Budgets," Audio-visual Instruction, XVI (December, 1971), p. 66.

4. Ibid., p. 67.

5. James W. Brown, Richard B. Lewis, and Fred F. Harcleroad, AV Instruction: Media and Methods, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p. 67.

6. Doris M. Timpano, Crisis in Educational Technology, (New York: Gilbert Press, 1970).

7. Alvin Rentzky and James Green (eds.), 1970 Standard Education Almanac, (Los Angeles: Academic Media, 1970), pp. 244-418.

TABLE 1

Geographical Spread of the Sample

Region	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Undetermined	1	0.9
Southeast	11	9.6
Northeast	17	14.9
New England	8	7.0
Midwest	28	24.6
Central	24	21.1
West	5	4.4
Far West	10	8.8
Southwest	10	8.8
Total	114	100.0

TABLE 2

Size of District Budgetwise

	No. of Districts	Percentage (%)
Unknown	29	25.4
Below $1.5 million	56	49.1
Between $1.5 and $5 million	17	14.9
Over $5 million	12	10.5
Total	114	99.9

TABLE 3

Grade Levels of the Districts Reporting

Grade Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Undetermined	18	15.8
K through 12	44	38.6
1 through 12	39	34.2
9 through 12	4	3.5
K through 8	6	5.3
1 through 8	3	2.6
Total	114	100.0

TABLE 4

Number of Pupils in the Districts*

Maximum	40,663
Minimum	301
Mean	3,545
Median	1,519

*No. of pupils could not be determined for 16 districts (14% of respondents).

TABLE 5

Decision Makers for Instructional Film Purchase*

(See Question 1)
(N = 114)

	Checked	Percent of Sample (%)
Individual teacher	62	54.4
Building principal	53	46.5
Librarian	46	40.4
Audiovisual coordinator	37	32.5
Teacher committee	27	23.7
Business manager	7	6.1
Others (written in)		
Do not buy films	14	12.3
Rental service	7	6.1
District superintendent County AV Office	each 5	4.4
Department Chairman Assistant Superintendent	each 4	3.5
Director of Instruction Regional IMC Film Cooperative Area Library	each 2	1.8
Coordinator of Instruction Director of Media Center Director of Educational Materials Curriculum Director Instructional Supervisor Subject Area Coordinator County Department of Education County Staff	each 1	.9

*There was an average of 2.3 checks per questionnaire.

TABLE 6

Budget Information

Budgets	Minimum ($)	Maximum ($)	Mean ($)
Total budget[a]	240,000	16,500,000	2,402,000
Instructional Media[b]	400	250,000	23,600
Equipment purchase[c]	200	75,000	8,800
Film purchase[d]	200	15,000	2,532
Film rental[e]	100	10,500	2,034

(N = 114)

[a]74.6% (85 districts) reported.
[b]92.1% (105 districts) reported.
[c]51.8% (58 districts) reported.
[d]32.5% (37 districts) reported.
[e]48.2% (55 districts reported.

TABLE 7

Estimated Percentages of Media Budget Allocation*

Budgets	Minimum (%)	Maximum (%)	Mean (%)
Equipment purchase[a]	10	100	61.15
Film purchase[b]	1	82	28.23
Film rental[c]	1	100	25.69

(N = 114)

*When a percentage was given by respondents it was considered less accurate than a dollar figure. These percentages were not converted back to dollars. Similarly, whenever dollar figures were given for all three categories they were converted to percentages for this tabulation. Hence, a longer number is given reporting percentages than dollar figures.

[a]68.4% (78 districts) reported.
[b]41.2% (47 districts) reported.
[c]65.8% (75 districts) reported.

TABLE 8

Checked Either Purchase of Equipment or Films or Film Rental

	Percentage (%) checked
Equipment purchase	78.1
Film purchase	48.2
Film rental	73.3

(N = 114)

TABLE 9

Do You Have a Stated Policy for Evaluation and Selection of Films?

	Percentage (%)
Yes	13.2
No	77.2
No response	9.6

(N = 114)